

Congressional Fire Services Institute/International Association of Arson Investigators/International Association of Fire Chiefs/International Association of Fire Fighters/International Fire Service Training Association/ International Society of Fire Service Instructors/National Fire Protection Association/ National Volunteer Fire Council/North American Fire Training Directors

December 14, 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
H-232; The Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

We are writing to express our support for a permanent House Homeland Security Committee, with full authority over homeland security issues. Our decision is based on a number of factors, none more important than the need to consolidate jurisdiction in the House on matters affecting our nation's preparedness against potential terrorist attacks and all other hazards that pose a risk to public safety. Just as Congress created one federal agency (U.S. Department of Homeland Security) to secure our nation from terrorist attacks, we believe that a permanent House Homeland Security Committee would resolve many of the jurisdictional impediments that have prevented the House from moving more aggressively on homeland security legislation.

We understand that this move would impact a number of standing committees. Nonetheless, the current structure is cumbersome for the organization representing our nation's first responders, as well as Congress. With the threat of another attack imminent, Congress cannot afford to spend time having numerous committees mark-up and re-mark up homeland security legislation. We witnessed this past session the challenges in trying to move legislation forward under this scenario. The Faster and Smarter Funding for First Responders Act had the support of first responder organizations. Yet because of jurisdictional claims, the bill stalled preventing needed reform to improve the management of federal homeland security grants.

Adding credence to our position, the 9/11 Commission Report recommends strengthening Congressional oversight of intelligence and homeland security. "So long as oversight is governed by current congressional rules and resolutions, we believe the American people will not get the security they want and need," reads the report. In a pre-9/11 world, the existing structure proved effective. But with the creation of a new department, the concomitant restructuring of 22 federal agencies and massive infusion of more federal grant dollars for states and local jurisdictions, consolidation of oversight is needed.

We thank you for your commitment and dedication to our nation's first responders and your continued support of America's firefighters.

Sincerely,

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CC: Congressman Christopher Cox, Chairman, House Select Committee on Homeland Security
Congressman David Dreier, Chairman, House Rules Committee